

MESSAGE

FROM THE

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES,

TRANSMITTING A

Report of the Commissioner of the General Land Office,

RELATING TO

PUBLIC LANDS IN MISSOURI AND ILLINOIS,

Which are unfit for Cultivation.

In compliance with a Resolution of the Senate of 4th April, 1826.

FEBRUARY 14, 1827.

Printed by order of the Senate of the United States.

WASHINGTON :

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REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONER OF THE GENERAL LAND OFFICE

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WASHINGTON, 29th January, 1827.

To the Senate of the United States :

The Report from the Commissioner of the General Land Office, and accompanying documents, herewith transmitted, are laid before the Senate in compliance with their Resolution of the 4th of April last, relating to the Public Lands of the United States, in the States of Missouri and Illinois, which are unfit for cultivation.

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS.

GENERAL LAND OFFICE,

January 29th, 1827.

SIR : In compliance with a resolution of the Senate, bearing date the 4th of April, 1826, in the following words, “ Resolved, That the
“ President be requested to cause a report from the General Land
“ Office to be laid before the Senate at the commencement of the next
“ stated session of Congress, shewing, as nearly as can be ascertain-
“ ed, from surveys heretofore made. and from other information, the
“ quantities and localities of so much of the Public Lands of the Uni-
“ ted States, in the States of Missouri and Illinois, as may be unfit
“ for cultivation, on account of being wet and marshy, or subject to
“ inundation from the overflowing of the rivers, or covered with
“ standing water in ponds or lakes ;” the Commissioner has the honor
to submit to the President a letter from Colonel M Rec, the Surveyor
of the Public Lands in Missouri and Illinois, marked A, with a copy
of a statement accompanying the same, marked B, which contain
the information called for, so far as it can be furnished from the sur-
veys.

With great respect, Sir,

I have the honor to be,

Your obedient servant,

GEO. GRAHAM.

The PRESIDENT of the United States.

[Extremely faint, illegible text covering the majority of the page]

SURVEYOR'S OFFICE,

St. Louis, 31st December, 1826.

SIR : In compliance with your letter, of the 6th of last April, which refers to this office the resolution of the Senate of the United States, requesting the President to cause a report to be laid before it, at the commencement of the present session, shewing, as nearly as can be ascertained, from surveys heretofore made, and from other information, "the quantities and localities of so much of the public lands of the United States, in the states of Missouri and Illinois, as may be unfit for cultivation, on account of being wet and marshy, or subject to inundation, from the overflowing of the rivers, or covered with standing water, in ponds or lakes ;" I have the honor to report :

That the surveys, on file in this office, do not, except in very few instances, furnish sufficient data, to calculate the areas of those portions of the public lands which are unfit for cultivation.

The law prescribing the mode in which the public lands shall be surveyed, directs the surveyor to "note, in his field-book, the true situation of all mines, salt-licks, salt-springs and mill-seats, which shall come within his knowledge ; all water courses, over which the lines he runs shall pass ; and also the quality of the lands." But it does not require any lines to be run, except such as are boundaries to sections, or fractional sections ; or necessary to connect the lines of a private survey, with those of the public lands. The practice, under this office, has been regulated accordingly ; it is only in a few instances that the meanders of lakes have been taken ; the boundaries of swamps, marshes, or inundation tracts, it is believed, have never been surveyed ; and their true areas, therefore, cannot be ascertained.

The general instructions, issued to the Deputy Surveyors, only require of them to note the distance, across any pond, swamp, marsh, or other obstacle, (except a navigable river,) *on the line*, which may intersect with it ; and to state the point of intersection. Ponds, swamps, &c. that are not crossed by any section-line, are, therefore, not even mentioned in the field notes, or but rarely ; and those which are crossed by only *one* section line, can have but one known dimension, and even its position, in relation to any other line, or side of the tract, remains undetermined. The instructions, however, are not always strictly followed ; and the intersections with, and distances across obstacles, are not uniformly given. Lines have, no doubt, been extended, during Winter, over surfaces of swamps, marshes, &c. that are unfit for cultivation, and, perhaps, impassable at any other season of the year ; but which, in their frozen state, may have escaped the particular observation of the surveyor. A general remark is sometimes made, at the end of a line, stating, in substance, that there is a good

deal of swampy land upon it ; or several ponds, &c. ; and it frequently occurs, that the field-notes of a line give its intersection with an impassable obstacle ; or mentions when it enters a swamp, marsh, &c. ; but omit to state, at which point the line is regained on the opposite side, in the first instance, or where it leaves the swamp, or marsh, in the second ; and so conversely. These omissions also occur where the swamp, &c. is sufficiently extensive to be traversed by two or more section-lines ; leaving it without any known dimension, or with only one ; from which, evidently, no estimate of the area can be made, that would merit any confidence.

Only a partial statement could be furnished, therefore, even of the number of tracts, or portions of the public lands, heretofore surveyed, as are considered unfit for cultivation ; and only a loose estimate of the areas of those portions which have two or more known dimensions. Such information, however, as the public surveys afford, is scattered through more than two thousand books of field-notes, and the examination of those books, making the necessary extracts from them, and the subsequent calculations, would have occupied nearly the whole force of the office, during the past season, to the exclusion of its other duties, and without any certainty, after all, of accomplishing the undertaking. It was, therefore, conceived most advisable, to confine the estimate to such districts of country, as might be supposed to have a more immediate relation to the objects, contemplated by the Senate.

The "bottom lands," particularly those which border on the principal rivers, naturally drew most attention, as containing, in proportion to their extent of surface the greatest quantity of wet and inundated lands, capable of being reclaimed, by drainage or other means ; and of being made, at a moderate expense, to unite the advantages of uncommon fertility, to those already secured by their position, of safe and regular water-communication with a market. The examinations were, accordingly, confined to the surveys of townships, and fractional townships, binding on the great Wabash, the Ohio, Mississippi, Illinois and Missouri rivers ; or which embrace any bottom lands, lying on either of those streams, (exclusive of the Islands.) within the States of Missouri and Illinois.

The Abstract, enclosed herewith, exhibits, in part, the result of these examinations ; together with estimates, founded on the data which they furnish.

Lakes and ponds, swamps, marshes, and wet or inundated tracts, which have *no dimensions* reported in the field notes, are not included in the abstract ; those having *one or more known dimensions*, exceeding *three chains* each, are enumerated, and the township specified in which they are respectively situated, accompanied with a statement of the estimated areas of those which have *two or more known dimensions*.

The whole number of townships amounts to 250 ; and their aggregate area, (roughly estimated from the plats,) to 3,913,800 acres ; the number of townships which contain ponds, swamps, &c. having *two*

or more dimensions, amounts to 182 ; and contain an estimated aggregate area of 2,977,000 acres, (nearly.)

In the above mentioned 250 townships there are 1096 lakes and ponds, or separate tracts of swamps, marshes, &c. which have one or more known dimensions, and of these, there are 332 which have two or more dimensions given, containing an aggregate area of 330,414 acres ; (nearly,) which, compared with the aggregate area of the whole number of townships embraced in the abstract, is in the proportion of one to 11 $\frac{4}{100}$ nearly ; but compared with the aggregate area of the townships in which they are situated, is in the proportion of one to nine, (nearly.)

If no probable estimate could be made of the areas of those tracts which have only one known dimension, by assuming its position and the figure of each tract, it is also clear, that any attempt to infer their areas from the estimated areas of those having two or more dimensions, by assuming the figures of the whole to be similar, would be equally wide of the truth. I have preferred leaving the statement as it stands ; which shews that in addition to the estimated number of acres unfit for cultivation, there are in the 250 townships specified in the abstract, 764 lakes and ponds, and separate tracts of wet and inundated land, each less than one mile wide, on the section line by which it is traversed, and probably less than two miles across, in a direction at right angles with the section line.

It is proper to remark, that the several tracts of land included in the abstract, are not always *expressly* stated in the field notes to be "unfit for cultivation," but that fact has been taken for granted whenever the description given, in other respects, made the presumption of it probable, unless the contrary was stated.

The greater part of the bottom lands within this surveying district is more or less liable to inundation from the overflowing of the rivers. What are called "second bottoms," (so frequent on the Ohio, and which are there entirely exempt from inundation,) are seldom met with on the Mississippi, or its tributaries, from the West, or on the streams within the State of Illinois ; the third, benches or bottoms, found on the upper Ohio, are, it is believed, peculiar to that river. But the inundation of these river lands, considered as an obstacle to their cultivation, depends on its frequency ; the season of the year at which it happens ; its depth ; and on the exposure of the surface of the ground to the injurious effects of strong currents, which again depends as much on the situation of the tract, as on the depth of water which covers it. The casual observations, however, which a surveyor may be enabled to make during a particular season of the year, are frequently calculated rather to mislead than to aid his judgment in determining the true character of those lands. Hence the contradictory statements that are sometimes made to this office concerning them ; an original survey describing land to be "not fit for cultivation," which is reported to be "first rate," in the re-survey of the tract by a different individual : and hence, also, surveyors have been rendered less careful of noting the circumstance of inundation in ordi-

nary cases ; or of expressing an opinion of the fitness or unfitness of such lands for the purpose of cultivation, except where they exhibit striking and unequivocal proofs of extreme inundation, or of almost total exemption from it. It results, therefore, that much of the public lands which are actually unfit for cultivation, in consequence of the overflowing of rivers, are not reported as such to this office, while, no doubt, a good deal has been so described erroneously.

There are two districts of country the surveys of which have not been particularly examined, although both of them contain extensive tracts of swamps, and wet or inundated lands. One of these districts is in the Northern part of the State of Illinois ; the other is near the South boundary of this State. The general surface of the country in both, is low, and level ; and would oppose an insuperable obstacle to the success of partial attempts to reclaim the soil ; at the same time that their geographical position is such, as cannot, for a long space of time to come, hold out sufficient inducement to more extensive undertakings. The District alluded to in Missouri, prevails with little interruption from White river to the Mississippi, extending South to the junction of the two rivers in the Territory of Arkansas. It embraces, notwithstanding its general character, much fine land, and high broken ridges occasionally occur between some of the water courses which intersect it higher up ; but the Castor and St. Francis, Black and White rivers, overflow a great deal of the intermediate country. The surveys in that quarter, however, including several hundred miles of township exteriors, are not yet completed.

I have the honor to be

Very respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

W. McREE.

GEORGE GRAHAM, Esq.

*Commissioner of the General Land Office,
City of Washington*

B.

RECAPITULATION.

				No. of Township in which the ponds, swamps, &c. specified in the abstract, are situate.	No. of ponds and lakes having only one dimension, areas of which are not estimated.	No. of Lakes or Ponds.	Lakes or ponds having two or more dimensions, areas of which are estimated.	Swamps, marshed and overflowed land, not fit for cultivation.		Aggregate Area.
							No. of tracts in each district having only one dimension, areas of which are not estimated.	Tracts having two or more dimensions, areas of which are estimated.		
						Estimate in acres of lakes and ponds in each district.		No. of tracts in each district.	Estimate in acres of the several tracts.	
STATE	{	In Kaskaskia District, on Mississippi river,	-	25	81	13	10,986 45	1	-	10,986.45
OF		In Edwardsville District, on the Mississippi and Illinois rivers,	-	42	85	19	16,750 17	44	28	58,247.86
ILLINOIS.		In Sangamen District, on Mississippi and Illinois rivers,	-	55	107	44	31,651 62	27	26	64,519.97
		In Shawneetown District, on Ohio and Great Wabash river,	-	34	124	26	15,043 97	63	17	53,572.74
		In Palestine District, on Great Wabash,	-	15	34	9	1,277 62	22	7	17,565.95
				171	431	111	75,709 83	157	78	204,892.97
STATE	{	In Salt River District, on Mississippi river,	-	13	10	10	550 65	15	21	9,099.98
OF		In St. Louis District, on Mississippi and Missouri rivers,	-	10	17	6	1,104 97	12	19	10,222.91
MISSOURI,		In Howard District North and South of Missouri,	-	16	30	8	1,007 62	18	23	8,209.90
		In Western District, North and South of Missouri,	-	10	8	7	1,077 02	2	1	1,092.99
		In Cape Girardeau District, on Mississippi river,	-	30	28	21	7,979 97	36	27	93,345.59
				79	93	52	11,720 23	83	91	125,522.02